

Brenda Hull receives Bill Holman Award at Watershed Gala



Brenda Hull, center, was the 2020 recipient of the Bill Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award in the 12th Annual Watershed Gala last month. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
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YOUNG HARRIS – MountainTrue hosted its 12th Annual Watershed Gala on Thursday, Feb. 27, at the Charles Suber Banquet Hall at Young Harris College.

The purpose of the event was to celebrate the achievements of the organization for the year and award the prestigious Bill Holman Award.

“Throughout his career in the environmental field, Bill Holman has presented persistent constructive leadership in legislative, administrative and educational roles,” said Callie Moore, Western Regional Director of MountainTrue.

“His accomplishments have facilitated water quality improvements throughout North Carolina,” she continued, “and his personal commitment to the environment and clean water is clear.

“It is similar characteristics put into action in the Upper Hiwassee River Watershed that MountainTrue seeks in all of our award recipients.”

Louisa Franklin, an English professor at Young Harris College, introduced this year’s award winner, Brenda Hull, who

was a nominee for the award in 2019.

“It’s a wonderful night to be here and to celebrate the amazing work of the staff and the volunteers who do so much to protect mountains and water in North Georgia and Western North Carolina,” Franklin said. “In light of increasing population in this area and the existential problem of climate change, it is imperative that we all actively support grassroots efforts such as this to maintain the health and vitality of our most precious resources: water, land and flora.

“It is also an honor to be with you and introduce you to this year’s Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award winner, my friend, Brenda Hull.”

In her introduction of Hull, a biology teacher at the college, Franklin shared several memories of interactions with her before welcoming the award recipient to the stage to give a speech after accepting the award.

“I can’t say enough good things about what used to be the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition and is now MountainTrue,” Hull said. “This has been a group of people totally dedicated to this place we live in, and that is the most important thing to me.

“When you teach at a place

like this, you try to teach young people about place, and it seems so simple – this is where you live, and that is place.

“Students come here from Florida, Atlanta and bigger towns, but they need to learn about the most important place they are in, which is this Southern Appalachian incredibly wonderful area that you and I live in.

“We are so lucky to live in this place. I can’t say enough about these mountains; they are a part of me as much as anything else out there.”

Added Hull, “I encourage each and every one of you to get involved in any way that you can. If you look at all of the Appalachian chain, we live in the best part, because we have more plant species than any place except rainforests, more salamander species than any place on the planet, birds that live here and move through here that are incredible.

“We are lucky people, and spend your money and spend your time, but understand that where we live is important to all of us and to the planet. Let’s take care of it together.”

Following the award ceremony, the gala concluded with auctions to help raise money to support the water quality of the area.

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enough sample size data set to know what it’s going to do, where it’s going to turn out.

“SARS and MERS were basically the same way. There was no real data behind them to drive the models, and they behaved in similar fashion. They outran the (CDC) projections pretty quickly.”

Walls said there is no vaccine for COVID-19, and it takes a year to a year and a half to develop a vaccine typically, plus whatever time is needed to get it cleared for human use.

“The biggest reason it’s being watched and worried about is because it’s a virus that we don’t know anything about and is affecting humans,” Walls said.

It’s been determined that the COVID-19 virus lives for about 72 hours once it’s been expelled through atomized droplets from a sneeze or cough. Therefore, it is recommended that people use best practices of personal hygiene developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC recommends that people wash their hands often with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is recommended.

Additionally, the CDC recommends that people: avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; avoid close contact with people who are sick; stay home if sick; cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue or the crook of the elbow and throw the tissue away; and

frequently disinfect surfaces like countertops, touchscreens, phones, doorknobs and handles.

These are the best practices advocated by Gov. Brian Kemp’s office, the Georgia Department of Public Health and the CDC that have been put in place within local government buildings, places of professional health care, and the school system in Towns County.

A major concern expressed by local stakeholders has been the spread of false information and rumors through social media posts, with some noting that, already, at least two Union County cases of the disease have been erroneously reported on Facebook.

The erroneous information has been removed, and Union General Hospital confirmed on its own Facebook page last week that there were no cases, confirmed or suspected, of COVID-19 in Union County at that time.

Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett has urged people to query official sources like the CDC, Gov. Brian Kemp’s office, and the Georgia Department of Public Health for coronavirus information, and never to rely on random social media posts.

The commissioner, Walls and Barnett also urged people to check in with these official sources for information on COVID-19.

School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said in a separate conversation last week that the school system

was doing all it could to protect students and staff alike.

“We have had a state-of-the-art disinfectant system for the past four or five years that is a misting system, and we mist every single classroom every single day after the students have left,” Berrong said. “And that’s supposed to kill 99 percent of all virus or bacteria on contact.

“We feel very confident that our school is as clean as it can possibly be and that our students are safe at school. But, obviously, the issue is not getting (COVID-19) at school – it’s being brought in from somewhere else, so that’s the concern.”

The Board of Education will be considering what protocols to put in place for students should someone in a local household happen to contract the virus.

“My suggestion is going to be that the student needs to stay home so that we can keep all the other students in the school safe,” Berrong said.

The flu is still widespread and active throughout Georgia, and flu shots are available and recommended by health care professionals.

Though the flu shot won’t prevent COVID-19, it may prevent serious complications and overburdening of the health care system in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

For more COVID-19 information, visit the CDC.gov and DPH.Georgia.gov websites.

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preside over cases involving misdemeanors, contract disputes, premises liability and various other actions,” the organization continues. “In addition, the Superior Court has exclusive equity jurisdiction

over all cases of divorce, title to land, and felonies involving jury trials, including death penalty cases.”

Georgia Superior Courts.org is managed by the state-created Council of Superior

Court Judges of Georgia, “which assists the Superior Court judges and the judicial circuits by providing administrative support, research, IT services, court automation and communications.”

School Board Appreciation Week

The Towns County School System is joining in a statewide celebration this week to salute the efforts of our local school board members. The week of March 16-20, 2020 has been proclaimed, School Board Appreciation Week in Georgia. The week-long observance calls attention to the contributions of local boards of education. On

this week when we celebrate school boards, we want to offer our gratitude for our local board of education who supports more than 1,000 kids in our schools every day.

The work they do is often a thankless job, but without their tireless efforts students would not receive the necessary resources and other supports they need to excel in

the classroom. On behalf of the employees at the Towns County Schools, we thank our local board of education for their service.

Please join us in extending our thanks to: Chair, Dr. Kilee Smith, Vice Chair, Tamie Bradley, and members Brandon Grimsley, Stan Chastain & Stephanie McConnell.